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AUTHOR	McMurray, J. G.
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ABSTRACT

The paper examines educational issues of older learning disabled (LD) students in Canada in light of responses by 163 principals. Among findings were that 71% of the secondary and 87% of the elementary schools had ID programs; that 70% of the secondary and 55% of the elementary schools did not have inservice programs to acquaint teachers with LD needs; that the most important diagnostic variables were written language skills at the secondary level and oral language skills at the elementary level; that nearly half of both groups agreed that the definition of LD was a major concern; that both groups doubted the adequacy of special teachers and consultants in their schools; and that secondary principals were nearly unanimous in agreeing that basic vocational skills are more central than maximum mainstreaming in ID programs. (CL)

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Learning Disabled Adolescents: Perspectives from Canadian Principals*

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J. G. McMurray, Ph.D.
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
N6G 1G7

Tompkins (1952) has made the point that in no other country in the world are events in the United States so directly and inevitably felt as they are in Canada. Though population mixes and governmental systems differ, Canadians are culturally and geographically close and are keenly aware of events to the south. In a country where it is estimated that 85% of the education library holdings are American and where a significant proportion of university faculty hold at least one U.S. degree, it is little wonder that Canadian educational issues, both administrative and curricular, are influenced either as a challenge to situations that exist commonly in both countries or as a defensive reaction against external forces.

In the realm of "special education", Canada has and will likely continue to follow the American model. In the 1950s and 1960s segregated classes for children with special needs mushroomed. At the secondary school level many boards (especially in British Columbia and Ontario) took advantage of "free federal money" to provide more meaningful services for adolescents, especially the mildly retarded. More recently, the impact of PL94-142 (in the U.S.) and the more general issues of mandatory legislation, children's rights and less restrictive environments are being considered seriously. Unlike the United States, Canada has no Federal Office

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of Education, little federal funding per se and mandatory legislation has only recently been passed in some form in three provinces (Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan). It is expected to be phased-in in Ontario by 1985. Recent studies by the author suggest that Canadians are in a very favorable position to learn from the experiences of special educators in other countries. Not only is this true in the legislative field, but particularly in the service field with the learning disabled.

Parent and school-related programs for children with learning disabilities have paralleled closely events in the United States and education/psychology students have been nourished by the writings of Strauss and Lehtinen (1947), Cruickshank, et al (1957) and Hallahan and Kauffman (1976) to name but a few. Labor pains associated with the production of an acceptable definition of learning disabilities have been similar on both sides of the border as has been the concern for early diagnosis and the implementation of programs for the young child.

Prior to the early 1970s the problem of school-related LD youngsters was limited to younger, elementary school-age children, the raticnale being that early recognition automatically implied ear'y remediation and efficient utilization of resources. Such a position was valid and historically appropriate. Unfortunately, however, a concurrent belief suggested that learning disabilities seldom occur in secondary school students and that "subject-matter" orientated teachers have neither the concern nor the skills to teach adolescents who have not "learned how to learn!"

Recent American authors, exemplified by Goodman and Mann (1976), Mann, Goodman and Wiederholt (1978) and Alley and Deshler (1979) have suggested the emergence of increased interest in the older LD student both by parents and by professionals who feel that such students have been neglected. The reason for increased interest in the United States has been summarized by Alley and Deshler as follows:

(a) PL94-142 guarantees free, appropriate, public education to all handicapped individuals up to the age of 21 years (now age 18) by September 1, 1980.

(b) The failure of Head Start programs--the fact that educational gains have tended to disappear at the end of the first few grades--has caused many to reconsider whether early childhood is the best or only time for educational intervention. In adolescence some students experience accelerated cognitive development. "Curing" LD seldom happens. Rather it is a chronic condition in which such behaviors as poor coordination, hyper-activity, distractibility and poor attention may manifest themselves in subtle ways.

(c) Adolescents not only require basic skills usually taught in elementary school, but they need also various compensatory skills, including social skills essential for more independent, autonomous learning.

(d) While diagnosis of individual learning handicaps in teenagers is often difficult, there is evidence of significant problems in self-concept, social adjustment, and motivation.

The purpose of this paper is to consider educational issues of the older LD student, i.e. the LD adolescent, and to share some rather preliminary data relative to Canada.

It is one of three investigations* and is designed to provide data regarding the incidence and descriptive nature of school programs as they relate to LD students, particularly in Canadian secondary school-age students. Despite the real limitations of Questionnaire-format attitudinal research, such a method provides a relatively inexpensive source of data and, if one accepts the adage that "if one believes something to be true, it is true for him", then it may be argued that the attitudes of principals, whether or not based upon a "true" interpretation of events, play a major role upon behaviors in their school. That is to say, the attitudes of the principal will determine to a large degree whether the concept

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* The others include: (a) a Questionnaire study of 288 elementary school principals across Canada (52% return) using a 38 item instrument describing the principal's conception of the incidence and nature of LD behaviors in elementary students, relative to the nature of instructional programs required to meet their needs; (b) a Questionnaire study of 600 secondary school principals in Canada relating the presence of LD behaviors to drop-out phenomena in academic stream students. Data from this project have not yet been examined.

of learning disabilities is understood and is projected into effective teaching practices.

The 25-item Secondary School Learning Disability Questionnaire (SSLDQ), exclusive of items relating to demographic data, included selected variables discussed in Volume I, 1978 of the Learning Disability Quarterly, which was devoted to issues relating to learning disabilities in secondary school age students. Completed questionnaires were received from 55% or 165 of the 300 randomly selected English-speaking schools in 10 provinces and two territories. Part I of the Questionnaire elicited the following demographic data. Ninety-two per cent of the schools were publicly supported. Forty per cent were west of Ontario; 52% from Ontario and Quebec; and 8% from the Maritimes. Fifty per cent were from schools whose student populations exceeded 750; 22% were between 500-749; and 29% were smaller than 500. Thirty-three per cent were rural; 28% core-area urban; and 39% suburban. Seventy-eight per cent of the respondents were principals, and the rest (5% vice-principals; 12% guidance counsellors; and 6% teachers) were delegated to complete the instrument by their principal. The data reflect primarily the attitudes and perceptions of principals of publically supported secondary schools across the country. Although 8% of the respondents were headmasters of private schools, for purposes of this paper no separate analyses have been done.

Table I

Part II defined LD adolescents as those

> "without significant sensory, emotional and intellectual disabilities but do exhibit specific difficulties in such areas as reading, oral and/or written language, mathematics and motor skills",

and principals were asked to respond to questions in terms of their own personal experience. It has been found that using this phrasing results in higher response rates because recipients do not feel that they are "speaking officially for their board".

TABLE 1 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA [N = 165]

		S.S.	ELEM.
LOCATION:	WEST	40%	32%
	CENTRAL	52%	61%
	EAST	8%	7%
SUPPORT:	PUBLIC	92%	99%
	PRIVATE	8%	.24%
SIZE:	750+	50%	
	500-749	22%	
	499--	28%	
RESPONDENT:	PRINCIPAL	78%	
	V.P.	5%	
	COUNSELLOR	12%	
	TEACHER	6%	
STUDENTS:	RURAL	33%	27%
	CORE AREA URBAN	28%	28%
	SUBURBAN	39%	44%
	DAY STUDENTS	97%	
	RESIDENCE	3%	
	WALK TO SCHOOL	46%	
	SCHOOL BUS	54%	

The five questions in Part II yielded data describing the percentage of students enrolled in various high school programs, the nature of student monitoring and the availability of staff training.

A recent research study by the author* reflects a remarkable agreement between the responses of principals in the elementary as opposed to the secondary panels. Where appropriate, and when question item formats are identical, comparative data are provided in Column 2 of the tables. For example, Part III consisted of four ranking questions intended to determine which groups of "at risk" students exhibited (in terms of the principal's perception) the greatest need for (a) improved, expanded educational programs; (b) the importance of diagnostic variables; (c) comparative skill deficiencies in LD students; and (d) which variables contribute most to the success of LD programs. Comparative data for the two principal's groups may be seen in Table III.

Part IV of the Secondary School Learning Disability Questionnaire (SSLDQ) consisted of 5-point Likert-scale items measuring the extent to which principals were in agreement about a range of LD variables. Examples of those variables include the nature and etiology of learning disabilities, diagnosis, curriculum and the kinds of changes that might contribute to improved educational opportunities for LD adolescents.

Discussion

The SSLDQ provided an overview of principals' attitudes toward an area of expanding interest of those who teach adolescents. The sample, although relatively small (N = 165) represents reasonably well the distribution of rural and urban schools with an English speaking population in Canada.

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* A similar Learning Disability Questionnaire tailored to the needs of the elementary panel was completed in April, 1979 by 288 (52% return) randomly selected elementary principals across Canada. This study is as yet unpublished.

Tables II - IV provide some preliminary comparative data from another study of the attitudes of elementary principals re similar LD variables.

Table II

One short-coming of the SSLDQ is that it did not directly provide an estimate of the percentage of the total school population believed to exhibit learning disabilities. The modal response of elementary principals was 9-12%. Although secondary school students drop out selectively due to age and a lack of reinforcement for poor achievement, Kass's (1974) point that LD "obtains at maturity" suggests that the occurrence of LD in students of both panels is comparable. Seventy-one per cent of this Canadian sample said that their schools offer special programs for LD adolescents (vs. 87% elementary) and 47% had done so for more than five years (vs. 66% elementary).

These figures seem very high and need to be replicated in more detail. Although one may question their precision, these data do reflect the attitudes of a substantial group of like-trained people who share similar experiences on the issue of learning disabilities. It is evident, however, that the principals' experiences are not all the same. For example, the estimates of occurrence of LD in various high school streams differed widely. One half of the respondents suggested that the percentage of LD students in the academic university-entrance stream is 1% or less, but 16% reported over 5%; for the community college stream 31% reported 1% or less, but a like percentage reported over 5%; and for the 2-year terminal stream 28% reported a frequency of 1% or less, but 28% suggested a frequency of 21% and above. It is evident that frequencies of occurrence differ not only among the streams but from school to school. Generalizations obviously depend both upon the experience of the observer and upon the nature of the school and its student population.

It is difficult to interpret the fact that 71% of secondary principals reported having special services/programs for LD students

TABLE II SCHOOL DATA

1. PERCENTAGE OF LD STUDENTS IN PROGRAMS INTENDED FOR:

(A) UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE:

1% OR LESS	49%*
2%	12%
3-5%	23%
5+%	16%

(B) COMMUNITY COLLEGE OR EQUIVALENT:

1% OR LESS	31%*
2%	14%
3-5%	24%
5+%	31%

(C) EMPLOYMENT AFTER ABOUT TWO YEARS:

S.S.:		ELEM:	
1% OR LESS	28%*	3% OR LESS	15%
2%	9%	4-5%	23%
3-5%	9%	6-8%	20%
5-10%	13%	9-12%	26%*
11-20%	13%	13% OR MORE	11%
21% OR MORE	28%*		

2. SCHOOL OFFERS SPECIAL PROGRAMS FOR LD STUDENTS: YES 71% (S.S.) 87% (ELEM.)

3. HOW LONG:

	S.S.:	ELEM.:
MORE THAN 5 YEARS	47%*	66%
2-4 YEARS	42%	29%
1 YEAR OR LESS	11%	5%

4. PROGRESS OF LD STUDENTS IS MONITORED:

	S.S.	ELEM.
DAILY	15%	14%
WEEKLY	17%	17%
MONTHLY	17%	26%
YEARLY	3%	4%
SAME AS OTHER STUDENTS	48%	27%

5. PERSON SPECIFICALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR MONITORING THE PROGRESS OF LD STUDENTS:

HOME ROOM TEACHER	17%
VICE-PRINCIPAL	2%
GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR	23%
SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER	46%*
OTHER	13%

6. SCHOOL HAS AVAILABLE IN-SERVICE PROGRAMS TO ACQUAINT TEACHERS WITH LD NEEDS: NO 70% (S.S.) 55% (ELEM.)

7. IF AVAILABLE, MAY BE REQUESTED BY STAFF: YES 78% (S.S.) 87% (ELEM.)

8. IF AVAILABLE, IS REQUIRED BY ADMINISTRATION: YES 44% (S.S.) 53% (ELEM.)

* MODE

and that almost half have provided them for five years or more. Unfortunately the nature and efficacy of the program can only be inferred, and then not very well, from other data from the Questionnaire. Personal experience would suggest that most high schools have a long way to go before these figures are realistic. Since 46% of the LD students' progress is monitored by a special education teacher, it is likely that many LD secondary students are perceived as also being "slow learners", since few other special education programs exist in Canadian high schools.

Table III

Table III presents data on the perceived importance of the need for expanded programs for LD students; which diagnostic variables are most important; the student skill areas most in need of improvement; and the variables over which the school has some responsibility and which are perceived as contributing to the success of LD programs. Comparative data from elementary school principals are included. It may be seen that students exhibiting learning disabilities and behavioral disorders appear to be in greatest need respectively for improved programs by both panels of schools. Sixty-one per cent of secondary and 65% of elementary principals ranked LD first and behavioral-emotional second. Culturally different children were ranked fifth by both groups. The most important diagnostic variables were written language skills at the secondary level and oral language skills at the elementary level. Personality characteristics were ranked fifth by secondary principals while math skills ranked fifth by elementary principals.

The greatest need for improvement in student skill areas was seen to be in functional reading and attention. Math skills trailed in importance in the opinion of both principal's groups. Work study skills fell about the middle, which may be surprising to those who place emphasis upon "learning how to learn." Finally, it may be seen that successful programs in both panels were characterized by good early identification, by adequate diagnosis

TABLE III

1. PRINCIPAL'S RANKING OF STUDENTS IN GREATEST NEED OF IMPROVED/EXPANDED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS:

	S.S.	ELEM.
LEARNING DISABLED	61%*	65%*
BEHAVIORAL/EMOTIONAL	50%	60%
SLOW LEARNERS/RETARDED	38%	32%
GIFTED	28%	34%
CULTURALLY DIFFERENT	18%	13%

2. MOST IMPORTANT VARIABLES IN DIAGNOSING POTENTIAL LD STUDENTS:

WRITTEN LANGUAGE SKILLS	79%*	47%
ORAL LANGUAGE SKILLS	47%	66%*
MATH SKILLS	31%	11%
INTELLIGENCE	26%	46%
PERSONALITY	25%	37%

3. AREAS IN WHICH LD STUDENTS NEED MOST IMPROVEMENT:

FUNCTIONAL READING SKILLS	68%*	51%
ATTENTION SKILLS	43%	60%*
WORK-STUDY SKILLS	42%	40%
BEHAVIORAL ADJUSTMENT	30%	38%
FUNCTIONAL MATH SKILLS	29%	20%

4. VARIABLES WHICH CONTRIBUTE MOST TO THE SUCCESS OF SECONDARY LD PROGRAMS:

EARLY IDENTIFICATION	76%*	82%*
ADEQUATE DIAGNOSIS	67%	70%
TEACHER TRAINING	54%	66%
INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION	50%	36%
SMALL CLASSES	31%	33%
PARENT INVOLVEMENT	23%	18%
SELF-CONTAINED CLASSES	10%	5%
MONEY FOR MATERIALS	5%	2%

and by the quality of teacher training. Consistency in the two groups of respondents in this regard was high. Neither placed high importance on either segregated classes or the availability of funds for materials.

Table IV (a)

Part IV of the SSLDQ required the principals to signify their agreement with each item on a five-point continuum. Table IV (a) indicates the total percentage of respondents who strongly agreed and/or generally agreed to each item. Where appropriate, the responses of elementary principals to similar questions are provided.

Approximately half of both respondent groups agreed that the definition of LD is a major concern and most felt that diagnostic criteria are vague. Despite the lack of definitional clarity, they seemed to have less difficulty than one might expect in naming the sources of pupil failure. The high school principals rated the educational environment as the chief, though by no means the only culprit. Indeed it is doubtful if the differences between the home, the school, and the child himself are significant etiologically. Two-thirds of the secondary principals agreed that Grade 9 pupils <u>are</u> as capable as they were twenty years ago. Despite this, approximately 70% of the principals saw clear and important roles for special education trained teachers in their schools.

Table IV (b)

The adequacy of services provided by certain special teachers and consultants in the school is clearly in doubt and comparative differences were recorded between the two respondent groups. Less than 50% of the secondary principals appeared to regard the services of social workers, nurses and school psychologists as adequate in their schools. Elementary principals felt the same way about nurses and guidance counsellors. The majority of neither

TABLE IV (A)

LIKERT - SCALE (5 POINT) RANKINGS	AGREE S.S.	AGREE ELEM.
1. MOST LDs COULD BE PREVENTED IF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IDENTIFIED CHILDREN EARLY	52%	55%
2. MOST LD STUDENTS' FAILURES ARE DUE TO FACTORS		
(A) WITHIN THEMSELVES	58%	63%
(B) WITHIN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT	72%	62%
(C) WITHIN HOME AND NEIGHBORHOOD	66%	77%
3. MANY LDs DO NOT APPEAR UNTIL SECONDARY SCHOOL	25%	3%
4. GRADE 9 STUDENTS ARE AS CAPABLE IN BASIC SUBJECTS AS THEY WERE 20 YEARS AGO	67%	
5. A SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER		
(A) IS OUT OF PLACE IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL	6%	
(B) SHOULD BE A CONSULTANT/TRAINER TO REGULAR CONTENT-SUBJECT TEACHERS	66%	
(C) SHOULD REMEDIATE BASIC DEFICIENCIES WHILE REGULAR TEACHERS RETAIN RESPONSIBILITIES IN CONTENT SUBJECTS	70%	
6. STANDARDIZED ACHIEVEMENT TESTS HAVE CONSIDERABLE USEFULNESS		
(A) WITH LD STUDENTS	32%	33%
(B) WITH AVERAGE STUDENTS	68%	70%
(C) WITH GIFTED STUDENTS	66%	57%

TABLE IV (B)

	AGREE	
	S.S.	ELEM.
7. PERCEIVED ADEQUACY OF SERVICES IN YOUR AREA (I.E., ADEQUATE OR INADEQUATE)		
(A) SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST(S)	34%	
(B) SOCIAL WORKER(S)	26%	
(C) SCHOOL NURSE(S)	44%	
(D) SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER(S)	59%	
(E) GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR(S)	82%	
8. PERCEIVED ADEQUACY OR EFFECTIVENESS OF VARIABLES FOR LD STUDENTS IN YOUR SCHOOL		
(A) DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES	46%	
(B) REMEDIAL PROGRAMS	54%	
(C) STAFF COOPERATION	59%	
(D) PARENT INVOLVEMENT	34%	
9. LD STUDENTS SHOULD HAVE REGULAR TIME-TABLED PERIODS		
(A) WITH REMEDIAL TEACHER IN BASIC SKILLS	89%	
(B) WITH SUBJECT-MATTER TEACHER FOR TUTORING IN CONTENT SUBJECTS	66%	
10. REMEDIAL/RESOURCE ROOM PROGRAMS FOR LD STUDENTS HAVE FAILED TO DEVELOP DUE TO LACK OF		
(A) ADEQUATELY TRAINED TEACHERS	64%	46%
(B) SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS	57%	40%
(C) COMMUNICATION BETWEEN REGULAR AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS.	39%	31%
(D) ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	32%	38%
(E) CONSENSUS THAT SPECIAL PROGRAMS ARE NEEDED	33%	24%

group was happy with the involvement of parents. It is interesting to note the decline in agreement regarding the effectiveness of school remedial programs. Almost 75% of the elementary principals regarded their remedial programs as effective, as compared with 54% of secondary principals. If one considers the rather depressing view of remedial programs outlined by Spache (1976), and the suggestion of Alley and Deshler (1979) that remediation is less and less efficient as a student ages, one may well question the degree of optimism expressed in the present research. Both groups of respondents pointed an accusing finger at the adequacy and availability of remedial/resource teachers.

Table IV (c, d)

Secondary principals were almost unanimous in their agreement that the attainment of basic skills and work-habits are central to LD programs. Maximum mainstreaming of LD students is of much less importance. Work-study programs were supported for secondary LD students and principals of both panels encouraged their schools to give students additional time, without stigma, to complete school. Secondary principals strongly supported individual educational plans, although many are probably unaware of the problems contingent with their use.

It is clear from the present investigations that more heat than light still surrounds the whole issue of LD. Many students exhibit multiple handicaps, however subtle, and a clear understanding of multi-facited behavior is elusive. Mandatory legislation and experimental curricula are likely to prove only partial solutions in their education. The crux is teacher training of a very special kind. Pre-service education consists largely of "survival skills" superimposed upon inexperience. When experience comes the teacher is then ready for renewed skill acquisition and theory-sharing in the light of continuing personal involvement with students who themselves have individually unique needs. Each student becomes "a problem to be solved". The belief that the problem <u>can</u> still <u>be solved</u> during the adolescent years is one challenge for to-day.

TABLE IV (C)

	AGREE	
	S.S.	ELEM.
11. FOLLOWING CURRICULUM COMPONENTS SHOULD BE EMPHASIZED IN SECONDARY LD PROGRAMS:		
(A) ATTAINMENT OF BASIC SKILLS	96%	
(B) WORK HABITS AND "LEARNING STRATEGIES"	57%	
(C) MAXIMUM MAINSTREAMING IN REGULAR CURRICULUM AREAS	51%	
(D) CAREER DEVELOPMENT PLUS FUNCTIONAL SURVIVAL SKILLS	73%	
(E) SPECIFIC JOB-ENTRY SKILLS	55%	
12. IMPROVED EDUCATION FOR LD RESULTS FROM:		
(A) PROVIDING SPECIAL CLASSES BEFORE OR AFTER REGULAR CLASS HOURS	17%	5%
(B) PROVIDING SPECIAL CLASSES IN SUMMER	12%	13%
(C) ALLOWING GREATER TIME (IN YEARS) FOR COMPLETING HIGH SCHOOL	60%	58%
(D) PROVIDING WORK-STUDY PROGRAMS	72%	--
(E) LD PROGRAMS SHOULD GIVE PREFERENCE TO THE MOST ELIGIBLE STUDENTS	16%	22%
(F) LD PROGRAMS SHOULD GIVE PREFERENCE TO HIGHLY MOTIVATED STUDENTS	46%	37%
13. EVERY STUDENT IDENTIFIED AS HAVING "SPECIAL NEEDS" SHOULD BE PROVIDED ANNUALLY WITH AN INDIVIDUAL EDUCATIONAL PLAN (IEP)		
(A) DETERMINED BY TEACHERS, STUDENT AND PARENT(S)	80%	81%
(B) PLAN TO BE REVIEWED AT LEAST TWICE A YEAR	86%	90%

TABLE IV (D)

		AGREE S.S.
14.	THE MAJORITY OF HIGH SCHOOL DROP-OUTS (STUDENTS WHO DO NOT COMPLETE THE PROGRAM IN WHICH THEY ARE ENROLLED)	
	(A) ARE BELOW GRADE 6 LEVEL IN READING AND/OR ARITHMETIC	44%
	(B) ARE POORLY MOTIVATED	93%
	(C) EXHIBIT EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS	56%
	(D) APPROPRIATE SCHOOL PROGRAMS ARE NOT AVAILABLE	51%
15.	EDUCATIONALLY MENTALLY RETARDED (EMR) STUDENTS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL AGE ARE BEST EDUCATED	
	(A) IN SEPARATE VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS	53%
	(B) IN SEPARATE SELF-CONTAINED CLASSES WITHIN COMPOSITE SCHOOLS	51%
	(C) IN REGULAR CLASSES WITH ORDINARY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS	16%

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